

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 31391 071951Z

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ACTION EUR-25

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AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL NICE

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SUBJECT: GENERAL STRIKE 6 DECEMBER 1973

1. SUMMARY: 6 DECEMBER "GENERAL STRIKE " (FIRST SINCE 1968 AND ONE OF VERY FEW IN FRENCH HISTORY), CALLED BY CGT/CFDT AND FEN (EDUCATION) AND SUPPORTED BY LEFT OPPOSITION PARTIES (PC, PS, LEFT RADICALS, PSU), FELL SHORT OF ORGANIZERS' EXPECTATIONS AND EFFORTS. REASONS FOR MODEST PARTICIPATION WERE OBVIOUS POLITICAL CHARACTER OF STRIKE AND POOR TIMING, SINCE FEAR OF OIL-INDUCED RECESSION HAS REPLACED COST OF LIVING AS DEEPEST CONCERN OF RANK-AND-FILE. PRESSURE BY UNIONS AND OPPOSITION

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PAGE 02 PARIS 31391 071951Z

PARTIES LIKELY TO CONTINUE UNABATED, DESPITE MODEST IMPACT OF

STRIKE BECAUSE OF BELIEF THAT TIME AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS WORKING FOR THEM. END SUMMARY.

2. DESPITE MONTH-LONG ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT AND SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENT OF PRESTIGE BY CGT/PCF, DECEMBER 6 "GENERAL STRIKE" HAD ONLY MODEST IMPACT. LEF IN PARIS AND PROVINCES ONLY MODERATELY AFFECTED BY STRIKE. METRO SERVICE ALMOST NORMAL; BRIEF SPORADIC ELECTRICITY CUTS DURING EARLY MORNING HOURS. TAXIS AVAILABLE AS USUAL AND AIR FLIGHTS ALMOST AS SCHEDULED. "LEGITIMATE" (COINCIDENTAL) STRIKE OF TRAIN CONDUCTORS AND ENGINEERS, WHICH STARTED UNEXPECTEDLY 5 DECEMBER, REDUCED BY 50 PERCENT COMMUTER AND LONG DISTANCE SERVICE. SURPRISINGLY, FEWER R/R WORKERS STRUCK ON 6TH THAN PREVIOUS DAY. PORTS AND NEWSPAPERS CLOSED DOWN WHILE SCHOOL SYSTEM (PRIMARY SCHOOLS ESPECIALLY) SERIOUSLY DISTURBED. WALKOUT IN CIVIL SERVICE VARIED BETWEEN 25 PERCENT AND 35 PERCENT.

3. EMPLOYERS ASSOCIATION TELLS US THAT, ACCORDING TO REPORTS FROM THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, 90 PERCENT OF PRIVATE ESTABLISHMENTS IN PARIS AND PROVINCES CARRIED ON BUSINESS AS USUAL, ABSENCES VARYING FROM 30 PERCENT IN PROVINCES TO 20 PERCENT IN PARIS.

4. IN CONTRAST WITH FOREGOING, DOWNTOWN PARIS MASS RALLY WAS LARGEST HELD SINCE 1968. ORGANIZERS CLAIM "SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND" MARCHERS, WHILE POLICE ESTIMATE 60,000 - 100,000 MORE REASONABLE. MARCHERS WERE HIGHLY DISCIPLINED, MATURE AND NOTABLY UNENTHUSIASTIC. SLOGANS WERE CONFINED TO "HALT RISING PRICES," AND SIGNS IDENTIFYING PARTICIPATING GROUPS WERE ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY CGT AND PCF. A FEW CFDT SIGNS AND EVEN FEWER PS AND FEN (EDUCATION) LEFT UNMISTAKABLE IMPRESSION THAT THIS WAS PRIMARILY A CGT-PCF SHOW. MANY MARCHERS WERE TRANSPORTED TO PARIS BY LARGE NUMBER OF BUSES PROVIDED BY COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED SUBURBAN MUNICIPALITIES - A TRADITIONAL ARRANGEMENT USED BY CGT-PCF WHENEVER THEY ARE DETERMINED TO BRING TO THE STREETS LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE.

5. WHAT WENT WRONG WITH A STRIKE FOCUSED ON AN ISSUE (COST OF LIVING) PRESUMABLY OF SUCH BROAD APPEAL
A. OBVIOUS POLITICAL MOTIVATION BEHIND STRIKE REDUCED ITS APPEAL.
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PAGE 03 PARIS 31391 071951Z

BERGERON, FO SECRETARY GENERAL, AND OTHER LABOR LEADERS WHO REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE, CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO PUTTING STRIKE IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE BY DENOUNCING ITS POLITICAL CHARACTER, WHILE AT SAME TIME MULTIPLYING CALLS ON MINISTERS, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER, TO URGE ACTION TO STEM RISING PRICES. THIS ACTIVITY CONVEYED TO RANK-AND-FILE SOME IDEA OF COMPLEXITY OF INFLATION PROBLEM AND ABSURDITY OF STRIKE AS A SPUR TO ANTI-INFLATIONARY MEASURES. FURTHER, ONE BY-PRODUCT OF FRANCE'S RECENT INDUSTRIALIZATION

IS MARKEDLY REDUCED RANK-AND-FILE INTEREST IN POLITICAL STRIKES, COMPENSATED BY GREATER STAYING POWER IN SUSTAINED STRIKES ON BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES.

B. TIMING OF STRIKE POOR. IN ADDITION TO BEING TOO LONG IN PREPARATION - WHICH GAVE GOF AND TRADE UNION OPPONENTS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPOSE IT AS POLITICAL AND COUNTER PRODUCTIVE - STRIKE MISSED ITS REAL TARGET. BY 6 DECEMBER, POSSIBILITY OF OIL-INDUCED RECESSION, WITH IMPLIED THREAT TO EMPLOYMENT, HAD BECOME PRIMARY CONCERN OF WORKERS. RESULTANT NERVOUSNESS OVER JOB INSECURITY WAS SCARCELY CONDUCIVE TO PARTICIPATION IN STRIKE.

C. IN OUR VIEW, MOST CONSTANT FACTOR UNDERLYING CAUTIOUS BEHAVIOR OF FRENCH WORKERS OVER LAST 3 YEARS HAS BEEN CONCERN ABOUT FUTURE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN FRANCE, EUROPE AND THE WORLD - LEADING TO JUDGMENT THAT THIS NOT THE TIME "TO ROCK THE BOAT". AS LONG AS FRENCH WORKERS FEEL THAT VOLUNTARY RESTRAINT WILL HELP KEEP ECONOMIC CONDITIONS MANAGEABLE CALLS FOR POLITICAL STRIKES WILL CONTINUE TO GO LARGELY UNHEEDED, AS EXPERIENCE WITH STRIKES SINCE 1971 HAS SHOWN.

6. SHOULD RANK-AND-FILE, HOWEVER, BEGIN TO BELIEVE THAT THE ECONOMY IS ADRIFT, AND THAT THEIR SELF-RESTRAINT NO LONGER SERVES ANY PURPOSE,

THEY WILL BE READY FOR VIGOROUS ROCKING OF THE BOAT UNTIL RUDDER BACK IN FIRM HANDS. THIS LIKELY TO HAPPEN, FOR EXAMPLE, IF UNEMPLOYMENT EXCEEDS 5 PERCENT OR CURRENT GOF EFFORTS TO REDUCE INCOME GAP BETWEEN TOP AND BOTTOM OF SOCIETY SLACKEN. LAST POINT IMPORTANT BECAUSE GOF'S ABILITY TO DEMAND SACRIFICES TO SOLVE ECONOMIC PROBLEM WILL DEPEND ON ITS IMAGE AS A GOVERNMENT DETERMINED TO REDUCE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INJUSTICE AND NOT AS REPRESENTATIVE OF "MONOPOLY CAPITALISM", AS OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE DOGGEDLY PORTRAYING IT.

7. COMMENT: 6 DECEMBER WILL BE ADDED TO LIST OF IMPORTANT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 PARIS 31391 071951Z

DATES IN FRENCH HISTORY. IT SAW FIRST GENERAL STRIKE SINCE 1968 AND ONE OF ONLY 6 SUCH STRIKES SINCE 1920. GOF KEPT ITS COOL AND GENERAL PUBLIC OBSERVED STRIKE CRITICALLY. APPARENTLY BOTH GOF AND PUBLIC HAVE LEARNED TO DISCOUNT 24-HOUR STRIKES MORE AS "SYMBOLIC" THAN AS DETERMINED EFFORT TO ATTAIN A GOAL.

8. THE QUESTION NOW IS WHAT LESSONS THE VARIOUS ORGANIZERS, ESPECIALLY CGT AND CFDT, WILL DRAW FROM MODEST IMPACT OF STRIKE WHICH HAD BEEN BILLED AS THE BEGINNING OF A SUSTAINED EFFORT BY THE OPPOSITION TO CREATE AND CHANNEL A MASSIVE POPULAR WILL WITH WHICH TO CHALLENGE ILLEGITIMACY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENT REGIME.

9. THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT CGT-CFDT AND OPPOSITION PARTIES WILL RELAX THEIR PRESSURE EVEN IF THE 6

DECEMBER EXPERIENCE COMPELS THEM TO ADJUST THEIR TIME
SCHEDULE AND REVIS THEIR TACTICS. THE OPPOSITION IS DETERMINED TO
SUSTAIN ITS CHALLENGE TO THE MAJORITY AND IS COUNTING ON
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND CGT AND CFDT TO MOBILIZE THE RANK-
AND-FILE ON ITS SIDE. OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE CONVINCED THAT
TIME AND ECONOMY WORKING FOR THEM, AND THAT NLY CAUTION THEY
NEED TO EXERCISE IS AVOID "RUSHING THINGS AND PEOPLE", AS LEROY
OF THE PCF PUT IT IN HIS REPORT TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ON 2
DECEMBER.

10. GOF WILL BE JUSTIFIED AS FEELING ENCOURAGED BY RANK-AND-FILE
RESISTANCE TO STRIKE CALL, BUT WOUL BE UNWISE TO UNDERESTIMATE
OPPOSITION PARTIES' ABILI

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